

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE WILLIAM J. PERRY
PRESS CONFERENCE, WITH MINISTER OF DEFENSE POPOVSKI
SKOPJE, FYROM, MACEDONIA
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MINISTER POPOVSKI: Today we had the pleasure of talking with the Secretary of Defense of the U.S. We introduced him to the security situation from our point of view. We had a joint assessment of the factors that destabilize the situation in the region and agreed that the peace in the Republic of Macedonia is one of the key factors for the peace in the region. In that sense, we determined that the peacekeeping forces of the UN in Macedonia are performing a very positive role in the preservice of the peace. Also that, considering the world situation and the current mandate of the peacekeeping forces, the number of the American soldiers is appropriate. We also had a very fruitful discussion about the bilateral cooperation in the field of defense, the education, the training, and in general about the further developing of relations between Macedonia and the USA.

SECRETARY PERRY: I came here to meet with United States troops that are part of the UN peacekeeping forces and to hold discussions with government officials particularly President Gilgorov and Minister Popovski. I want to thank Minister Popovski and indeed, all of the Macedonians I've met for a very warm welcome.

Much of the time with Minister Popovski was spent working out plans for the exchange of military officers for training of Macedonian military officers in the United States and at our training centers in Europe for cooperation and defense equipment -- especially relative to communication interoperability of communication equipment.

Minister Popovski and I have agreed and the President has endorsed the formation of a bilateral working group on defense cooperation. This group will be formed and will hold its first meetings in a few weeks from now. Its purpose will be to expedite these programs of cooperation which I've already briefly described to you.

Let me comment briefly about my visit to our troops. First of all, they have very high morale, not the least of which is because they have been so warmly received by Macedonians. But also because they understand how important their mission is and are dedicated to it. They believe and I believe that they're fully ready and fully capable of carrying out their mission.

Their purpose here is preventive. We believe that Macedonia is in many ways key to the stability in this entire region. Also we believe that peace and stability in the Balkans is a crucial factor not just to this area, but indeed to the whole world.

Minister Popovski and I are ready to take questions.

Q. We want Mr. Perry to answer just one question. Where is the map of Macedonia placed in the Pentagon? Is it in the department where there are only 500 soldiers in a peacekeeping mission? Is it in the department where strategic plans are being prepared for increasing the number of the American soldiers for (inaudible) region? Or, is it in the department where about 20,000 American troops are planned for the implementation of the peace plan for Bosnia?

SECRETARY PERRY: First of all, there's a map of Macedonia in my office. Secondly, one of the issues which I review every month, and indeed, sometimes weekly, is the adequacy of the U.S. forces deployed around the world to carry out the mission. Most recently within the past few weeks I have reviewed the question of the U.S. forces here as part of the UN peacekeeping force and to carry out that mission. Admiral Smith and General Shalikashvili and I all believe that these present forces are capable of carrying out the peacekeeping mission, but we will revisit that question frequently.

Q. Dr. Perry, might I ask, I know you don't want to get out ahead of the contact group, but the Muslim (inaudible) has approved the division of Bosnia the peace plan has proposed and the Serbs seem to be dragging their feet. Can you give us some assessment of that situation? How you feel about it -- perhaps if you've heard the Serbs will approve it?

SECRETARY PERRY: Since the United States is a part of the contact group and part of the peace plan proposal that was made, we of course are pleased that the Bosnia government has accepted it. We and the other nations of the contact group have urged in very strong terms the acceptance of this peacekeeping plan -- or this peace plan -- by the Bosnian Serbs as well. What decision the contact group makes tomorrow in its meeting on consequent actions will quite clearly depend on the answer we get from the Bosnia Serb's government. We've already reports speculating on what their answer might be. At this stage I'm prepared to wait for the rest of the day to see what it is.

Q. Mr. Secretary, you said today that Macedonia is key for the security of the Balkans and the world itself. What will the American government do for Macedonia in the security conference since the Greeks are stopping us with (inaudible) the American pressure on the Israelis, Egyptians, Camp David is a different game?

SECRETARY PERRY: First of all, I believe that the dispute between Greece and Macedonia is hurting both countries and that resolving that dispute would be a great benefit to both countries. The United States is a friend to both countries and will do all that it reasonably can to influence a positive resolution. But they are both sovereign nations and we cannot and do not wish to try to dictate to them.

Q. Mr. Perry, you are visiting a few countries in the region they are (inaudible) members of Partnership for Peace. Macedonia is the only one country which is not (inaudible) as a member in Partnership for Peace. Why and when will it be?

SECRETARY PERRY: I support the Partnership for Peace membership of Macedonia. I do not -- this is not a unilateral decision for the U.S. government. Therefore, we can only contribute to that discussion. I hope that that will develop in the not distant future, but I'm not a good forecaster of how that might actually turn out.

Q. ...in and around Macedonia and the region? What's your estimation about the security in this region now?

SECRETARY PERRY: Before I came here, I sought advice from our military leaders on that question. And I've discussed that same question with both the officers and command of our forces here and with Brigadier General Telletson who's in charge of the UN peacekeeping forces. They see no sign of military threats and believe, therefore, that their forces are adequate to the present situation. This is a matter that they and we will watch on a daily basis.

Q. How many members of Macedonia military are already in the United States for military training and is there any chance or possibility to get military financial support and to take part in military (inaudible) this year?

SECRETARY PERRY: I think I can answer that question much better after we have our first meeting of the bilateral working group and I urge you to seek a report at that time. What we're planning to do in that group is initiate a vigorous program to accomplish all of the objectives that you described in your question.

Thank you very much.